

Tonbridge Sports Association

Annual Report 2013/2014

The year under review has been somewhat eventful. Last year, we were looking back on the Olympics and looking forward to greater interest in sports participation being seen in and around the Tonbridge area. Our report referred to the Olympic legacy and, in some specific sports, this has had a small effect. However sports participation, particularly for our younger age groups, still relies on the enthusiasm of those volunteers who manage our local member clubs.

The period of this report starts in the Spring of 2013 when we were just finishing another successful winter season of sport. The TSA arranged that extra renovation work should take place for a number of football pitches. The goal mouths, in particular, required attention, and it is pleasing to report that this was able to be scheduled into the contractors work, and has been successful. At the Annual General Meeting of the Tonbridge Sports Association, in April 2013, there were a number of comments from member clubs that home matches were always being played on better pitches than away matches. The Football Association's statement that Council-run pitches are poorly maintained shows Tonbridge to be an exception.

At the regular TSA/TMBC Liaison meetings part of the meeting relates to sports development. A number of initiatives are discussed and through this we have found a new home for netball, arranged for clubs to attend courses on first aid and safeguarding and helped the introduction of Park Run. The first Park Run took place, around the Racecourse Sportsground, in November. This has been attracting over 100 runners every Saturday morning during the winter months. "Spring into Sport" is another initiative involving a number of our member clubs giving free taster sessions during April 2014.

The TSA/TMBC meetings, being regular and documented, serve a very useful purpose. The discussions allow planning for future development of facilities and also pre-empting matters that could have become issues had they not been discussed and the approach agreed. The TSA has also liaised in order to maintain and progress the sport of cricket. However this has proved difficult and now the last remaining cricket club on the Racecourse Sportsground has ceased to operate. The summer came and we had temperatures, in July that made the summer grass sports and the sports that use our waterways as pleasurable as they could be.

An all year round Club that has benefitted from the Olympic legacy, and enabled it to build on what had become an established club, is Tonbridge Athletics. When the club operated 10 years ago there was a membership of 200. There is now a membership of over 800 and its members meet and train on six days of the week. The Club now probably contributes the highest percentage of athletes to the County Championships and has the highest percentage overall representation within the county teams. In terms of athletes affiliated to English Athletics the club is in the top six in the country.

A gold medallist in the 2014 Winter Olympics started many years ago as a member of the club. A junior member of the Club, Lewis Church, has been chosen to be the Commonwealth Baton Bearer, at Tonbridge Castle on 5th June, amongst an illustrious sporting group. The TSA is pleased to be party to the continuing discussions on a new Community Use Agreement for the track at Tonbridge School.

The winter season started with the usual over eagerness to commence playing. It was also a time when a review of Health and Safety, for playing football, was considered a priority. Meetings have taken place to review the part that Clubs, the Ambulance service and TMBC play in ensuring the well being of those injured whilst playing. This was a timely reminder and action has been taken to remedy misconceptions and the action that needs to be taken when an injury occurs.

In October the TSA commented on the proposals for a new Angel Leisure Centre. We were pleased to be part of the public consultation enabling us to add to the Tonbridge Badminton Club concerns. On the 1st November the leisure facilities of the Angel Leisure Centre, Tonbridge Swimming Pool, Poult Wood Golf Centre and Larkfield Leisure Centre passed into the management of the Tonbridge & Malling Leisure Trust. As regards our member clubs, and indeed the general public, this was a seamless transition. There will continue to be opportunities for our member clubs and already there are membership changes introduced at Poult Wood.

It was at the beginning of December that representatives of South East Water Company attended the TSA/TMBC Liaison meeting to give a presentation on the installation of two new water extraction chambers on the Racecourse Sportsground, the work due to commence at the beginning of January 2014. Through earlier liaison the plan of the traffic and siting of the plant had been revised. Through this planning extra funds had been allocated to ensure that no football pitches would be affected during the period of the works.

The winter season changed in mid December when severe weather was forecast. This increased to a Flood Warning on the 24th December, affecting the Racecourse Sportsground. During the day the Leigh Barrier was at full capacity and therefore the sports pitches provided additional floodplain storage of around 1 million cubic metres. The result of this is that the Sportsground submerged to a depth of approximately 5ft and flooding entered the Football, Rugby and Bowls Clubhouse's together with the Tonbridge Swimming Pool. In addition flooding entered, and considerably damaged, the Angel Indoor Bowls Club.

Although there is some insurance cover for this event, discussions with the insurance companies have been difficult, there are uninsured losses, and there is no insurance cover for the future. There are now numerous meetings already held to consider what lessons have been learnt in order to deal with the future. The Racecourse Sportsground will always be a flood storage area and the Environmental Agency will continue to use this as part of its water management strategy. This flood, by reoccurring over a number of weeks in January and February 2014, also had a considerable effect upon pitches that were already suffering from subsidence due to underground streams. The Clubs directly affected are receiving financial assistance from TMBC, for which they are very grateful. They have also received assistance regarding getting their buildings back to their original state.

It is worth recording the assistance given by Tonbridge Canoe Club in the process of clearing the surrounding rivers. However the effect of the flooding may be felt by the clubs, for some time. The clubs will have to work hard on maintaining their membership after an interruption of normal activities for some three months. Tonbridge Swimming Club had to reduce weekly activities and move to Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells. Both rugby and football played away matches, and had a number postponed, which has now put a strain on the administration of the move to the summer season. It is important to recognise that the clubs whose premises have been directly affected will need protection against the costs arising from a reoccurrence.

The condition of pitches, on our other sportsgrounds, caused matches to be postponed so we now end a winter season as unfinished as a number of pitches become cricket outfields. For all the Club's affected it is a question of picking up the pieces and having volunteers to get everything put back together again. The enthusiasm and hard work of those who manage our member clubs will see that sports participation will recover.

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